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Brown Poses a Mystery

H. Rap Brown is missing.

Members of his family say they have not heard from him, nor have his defense lawyers in Bel Air, Md. His friends are worried about him.

The last time the indicted leader of the Student National Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was seen was on Sunday in New York City, when he set out in a blue Mustang, telling his wife he was bound for BelAir.

Harry E. Dyer Jr., the Harford County Circuit Court judge presiding over Brown's trial was surprised.

Brown's attorneys were publicly unconcerned when Brown didn't turn up on Monday, a day of pretrial motions and other legal formalities. Late that day, however, the legal staff began to wonder, and yesterday—after the bombing of a car they issued public appeals to Brown to avoid Bel Air.

Ralph Featherstone of Washington and another man who has not yet been officially identified were killed late Monday when the car in which they were riding blew up just outside Bel Air. Featherstone is a long-time friend of Brown's.

"I don't think he (Brown) is even in Maryland," chief defense attorney William Kunstler told reporters yesterday. Kunstler said he had told Mrs. Brown in a phone call yesterday morning to "stop Rap, stop him" if she could.

Meanwhile, police put out an alert for Brown or his car from New York to Baltimore. They said the search was most intensive between Wilmington and Baltimore.

The search technically was for a missing person, not a fugitive, police said, since Brown's $10,000 bond is still in effect, permitting him to be in New York City, New Orleans, or anywhere in Maryland.

Asked yesterday if he planned to revoke Brown's bond for failure to appear, Judge Dyer said:

"Sure, I could order that. The court ordered snow for today too, but it didn't come."

The implication appeared to be that Dyer planned to give Brown every opportunity to appear on his own initiative.

So why doesn't he? Three theories were advanced yesterday.

The first is that Brown may have met with foul play.

The second is that Brown planned all along to arrive in Bel Air on Tuesday morning, in time for the selection of a jury. Having heard of the bombing and possibly having been warned in advance, he is "lying low" in self-defense, Kunstler hypothesized.

The third theory is that, like fellow black militant Eldridge Cleaver, Brown thought better of appearing for trial and has fled or is fleeing the country.

Friends and associates prefer the second theory. They argue that Brown has always made his own arrangements to appear at trials, and his been reliable. Furthermore, they say, Brown was not close to Cleaver while Cleaver was still in the U.S., and had drifted away from Cleaver's ideological position in recent months.

Several of Ralph Featherstone's friends in Washington understood that Featherstone was on his way to Bel Air specifically to meet with Brown.

That planned meeting, they feel, may indicate that whoever "got" Featherstone—if anyone did—may be bent on "getting" Brown too.

Kunstler said he spent "all day" on the phone yesterday attempting to locate Brown, with no success. He told reporters that Mrs. Brown was "sitting by the phone" in New York, and that Brown's mother and brother in Mississippi had not heard from him.

"We are just worrying that something might have happened to him," Kunstler said.